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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Somaliland Elections Postponed as Parliament
Tables Impeachment Motions

REF: Nairobi 1834

Summary

11. (SBU) For the fourth time, Somaliland's National Electoral Commission announced on September 6 that presidential elections would be postponed. On September 5, 43 legislators from Somaliland's two opposition parties tabled a motion in the House of Representatives to impeach the President and Vice-President. During the same session, 29 MPs from the ruling party tabled a motion to allow MPs to remove the Speaker of the House and his two deputies (all representatives from the opposition parties) by a simple majority vote. On September 8 when the legal advisor made the recommendation that both motions be debated by parliament, an MP instigated a fight in the chambers and reportedly drew a pistol. The police responded by locking the chambers of both the upper and lower houses of parliament, thus preventing any additional debate over the competing impeachment motions. No shots were fired but four MPs were injured and several journalists and members of the public were arrested. The political stalemate continues as public frustration mounts along with increased use of force by state security forces. End Summary.

Presidential Elections Postponed

12. (SBU) On September 6, the seven members of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) formally announced that the presidential election cannot be held on its scheduled date of September 27. This announcement marks the fourth official postponement of Somaliland's presidential election. The NEC members did not set a new timeline of election date, stating that the stakeholders would have to agree on the way forward. The representatives told the press the NEC members agreed on the following:

- To reverse the decision reached by four NEC members in which they annulled the Voter Registration.
- To accept that it is not feasible to hold the Presidential election on September 27, 2009 due to technical, political and economical reasons.
- To allow time for arbitration between the political parties and wait till the parties reach a consensus that will determine a possible timeline for the election.

The reversal of its July decision to proceed with elections without the voter registration list marks a major milestone. Unfortunately, this decision was overshadowed by events at parliament unfolding at

the same time.

Competing Impeachment Motions
Tabled in Parliament

13. (SBU) On September 5, 43 legislators from Somaliland's two opposition parties tabled a motion to impeach President Riyale and Vice-President Ahmed Yusuf Yassin in the House of Representatives. The motion reportedly accused the President and Vice President of crimes including embezzlement of national assets, violation of the Constitution, high treason and being "dictators." During the same session, 29 MPs from the UDUB ruling party tabled a motion to amend procedural rules to allow MPs to remove the Speaker of the House and his two deputies (all representatives from the opposition parties) by a simple majority vote. (Note: At present under the current procedural rules, a two-thirds majority of the 82 member parliament is required to remove the Speaker and the President and Vice-President.)

Violence Erupts and
Police Close Parliament

14. (SBU) The morning of September 8, Ahmed Ali Kahin, parliament's legal advisor, submitted his findings that both motions were legal and could be debated by the legislative body. Kahin said that since the impeachment motion was filed first, it should be debated first. Shortly after the formal opening of debate, one of the MPs from the

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ruling UDUB party, Abdirahman Mohamed Jama, started shouting at the speaker. Opposition MPs stepped in and an altercation between ensued. Jama reportedly drew a pistol from his briefcase, but no shots were fired (the gun reportedly jammed).

15. (SBU) Police forces entered the legislative hall and the Speaker closed the session. Although the MPS urged the police to arrest only the MP who had pulled the gun, the commander reportedly told the representatives that he had orders to close the building. The security forces ushered all MPs out and reportedly arrested several members of the media and the public who were at the session. Four MPs were injured. Police locked the chambers used by both houses of parliament, including the space where the Guurti (upper House of Parliament) convenes.

16. (SBU) The security presence in the capital is heavy and since September 6, all of Hargeisa's main streets near the Parliament and Presidential compound have been blocked by police. Most of our contacts told us that the disturbance in parliament was calculated, similar to the altercation initiated by six UDUB MPs on August 24 (reftel), to prevent an impeachment motion. When we spoke to representatives of the opposition parties, they believed they had the votes to support the impeachment of the President and Vice-President.

Guurti Takes a Stand
On the Political Crisis

17. (SBU) Somaliland's Guurti (House of Elders) has played a constructive mediating role and appointed a committee to evaluate the current political situation. On September 5, the committee offered its suggestions which the representatives overwhelming passed (55 for, 2 abstained, Speaker did not vote). The Guurti decided on the following:

- The members will be neutral to all the political parties.
- The members must not join the political parties.
- The members will respect any consensus reached by the political parties which is for the interest of all the people in Somaliland. If the political parties don't reach a consensus soon, the House of Elders will implement its constitutional duties.

After the vote, the Speaker of the Guurti, Suleiman Mohamud, reportedly said "the President must focus on the interest of the people instead of holding on to his position; otherwise he must step down from the presidency as a candidate for the Presidential election."

Comment

18. (SBU) With the official postponement of the presidential elections for the fourth time, all stakeholders and the public are growing increasingly frustrated. Many Somalilanders consider recent events in parliament to be part of the government's plan to stay in power, at all costs. By closing down the parliament building, it has prevented any debate on the impeachment motions and the Guurti from implementing its "constitutional duties." Opposition leaders told us their supporters are calling for public protest, but they fear that unlike the historic peaceful protests of August 20, this time violence could ensue. The government is increasingly relying on the use of state security forces to maintain a more aggressive security posture. In this environment, mediation remains stalled and none of the political parties has mentioned the voter registration list, the composition of the NEC, or any of the other prerequisites to plan a presidential election. We continue to engage with our international counterparts and will offer our position on political proposals to be carried back to Hargeisa by a mediation team likely to be co-led by the UK and Ethiopia.

RANNEBERGER